

CLAIMS

1. A process for the production of conjugated linoleic acid, in which
 - (a) linoleic acid lower alkyl esters are isomerized in the presence of alkali metal alcoholates,
 - (b) the now conjugated linoleic acid lower alkyl esters are saponified with water in the presence of lye and
 - (c) the saponification product is neutralized with phosphoric acid.
- 10 2. A process as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that linoleic acid lower alkyl esters corresponding to formula (I):
$$\text{R}^1\text{CO-OR}^2 \quad (\text{I})$$
where R¹CO is the acyl group of a linoleic acid and R² is a linear or branched alkyl group containing 1 to 5 carbon atoms, are used.
- 15 3. A process as claimed in claims 1 and/or 2, characterized in that the isomerization step is carried out at temperatures of 90 to 150°C.
- 20 4. A process as claimed in at least one of claims 1 to 3, characterized in that the saponification step is carried out at temperatures of 40 to 90°C.
5. A process as claimed in at least one of claims 1 to 4, characterized in that the saponification step is continued to a cleavage level of 80 to 100% by weight.
- 25 6. A process as claimed in at least one of claims 1 to 5, characterized in that the neutralization step is carried out with phosphoric acid at temperatures of 50 to 90°C.
7. A process as claimed in at least one of claims 1 to 6, characterized in that the phase separation following the neutralization step is carried out
- 30 at temperatures of 50 to 100°C.